



Into the Lion's Den; Dear Ms; Something Slimy on Primrose Drive; The Ramsbottom Rumble

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News & Choice:

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The 'Black Cats' series promises fast, exciting stories for fluent readers age eight plus and Deary's **Into the Lion's Den** certainly matches that description. It's an action-packed adventure set against the background of a particularly horrible bit of history, the Roman gladiatorial games where Christians were thrown to the lions. The book mixes real and invented characters - the trio of unfortunate Christians waiting to face the lions is invented as are the evil animal keeper and noble attendant boy but the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son and daughter Commodus and Lucilla were real. The book is packed with historical information but Deary knows exactly how to keep his readers hooked. The pace never flags and there's an equal mix of humour and excitement.

Deary's book uses diary entries, gladiatorial reports, letters, even diagrams to break up the text. Poulson's **Dear Ms** uses letters, notes passed between children in class and text messages - and nothing but - to tell the stories of her characters, football-mad David, popular Mandy, depressed Kate, outsider Tracey and down-to-earth Steve. She uses this format really well; the truth about what's happening to each child outside school is gradually revealed as those bites of direct first-person narrative create characters we genuinely care about. The book doesn't shy away from the ordinary misery of life, family break-up in particular, and is often genuinely poignant.

Something Slimy on Primrose Drive is a zany, madcap adventure. It tells of two sets of neighbours, the ultra conservative Rigid-Smythes and the Wolfbanes, newly arrived, weird but desperate to fit in. There's more than a touch of the Adamses about the Wolfbane family although, in all the excitement of the plot - the two families find out they actually have much in common then unite to retrieve a suitcase full of cash stolen from the Rigid-Smythes by an unscrupulous and phoney property developer - it's never really made clear whether the Wolfbanes are truly supernatural

or just acting it. Trifles likes this won't spoil the fun for young readers though.

The weakest of the bunch is Byng's **The Ramsbottom Rumble** which while it shares some of the tempo of Wallace's book suffers from a very old-fashioned story - two boys set out to prove that their gran's new suitor is a trickster up to no good - and a plot which relies on the serial stupidity of old women.

Running Order:

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